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CONSUMER FOOD INSIGHTS

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INTRODUCTION

Consumer Food Insights (CFI) is a monthly survey of more than 1,200 American adults from across the country. Since January 2022, the Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability (CFDAS) at Purdue University has used this survey to track trends and changes in consumer food demand and food sustainability behaviors.[1] Visit purdue.ag/CFDAS or contact cfdas@purdue.edu for more details.

In this edition, we break down the data by household child status to take a closer look at how the presence of children in the home influences food-related behaviors, spending, and experiences with food insecurity.[2] New questions this month aim to better understand consumer perceptions of the supply side of the food value chain.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM SEPTEMBER

- The SFP Index (page 6) continues to exhibit little change, reflecting stability in consumer food purchasing habits and intentions.
- Those with kids in the home are more likely to buy socially, environmentally and nutritionally sustainable foods than those without.
- Consumers generally trust firms and farms in the food supply chain to act in their best interest, with farmers and ranchers most trusted.
- Consumers most strongly associate taste and nutrition with food manufacturers, while price is most closely linked to food retailers.
- Limited awareness of the food value chain highlights an opportunity for public outreach to boost understanding and engagement.
- Monthly food insecurity dropped to 13% after trending upward since mid-2024; households with children remain more at risk.
- Households with children eat out more; however, they tend to opt for more convenient takeout and delivery options when doing so.

SFP INDEX	FOOD INSECURITY	FOOD SPENDING	GROCERY STOCKOUTS
-1*	-1	+8	+0
70/100	13%	$206/WEEK	11%

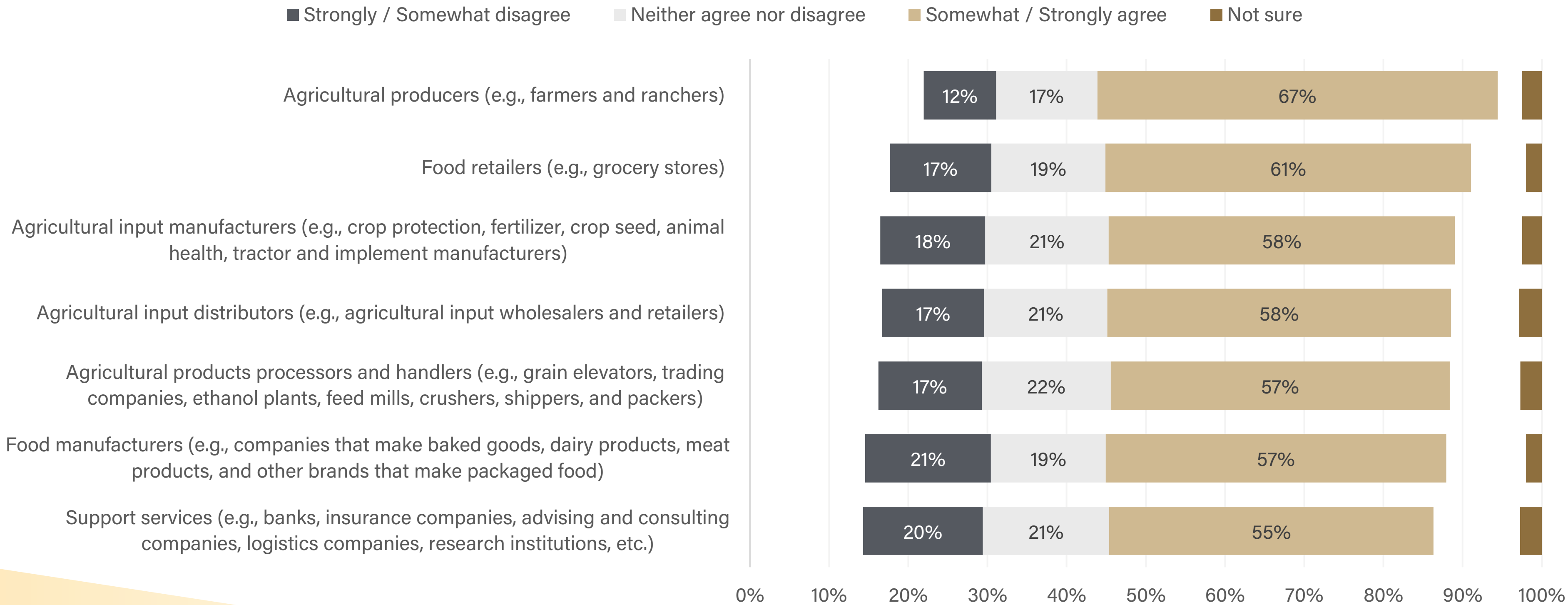
*+/- in upper right corner tracks the unit change in the statistic from the previous month or quarter, depending on data collection frequency

FOOD VALUE CHAIN

What do consumers think about the food value chain?

This month's new questions explore consumer trust across the food value chain, drawing on perceptions of the food supply through the lens of three key consumer values: taste, nutrition and affordability. **Figure 1** shows that consumer trust in different groups within the food value chain is high, with many trusting them to act in the best interest of consumers. Notably, trust is highest among agricultural producers, such as farmers and ranchers, echoing previous results that highlight positive sentiment toward those who grow our food.[3] The most common reason for "not sure" responses was a lack of information or knowledge on these groups to confidently form an opinion, revealing an opportunity for public outreach.

Figure 1. *"I trust [GROUP] to act in the best interests of me and other consumers."* Sep. 2025



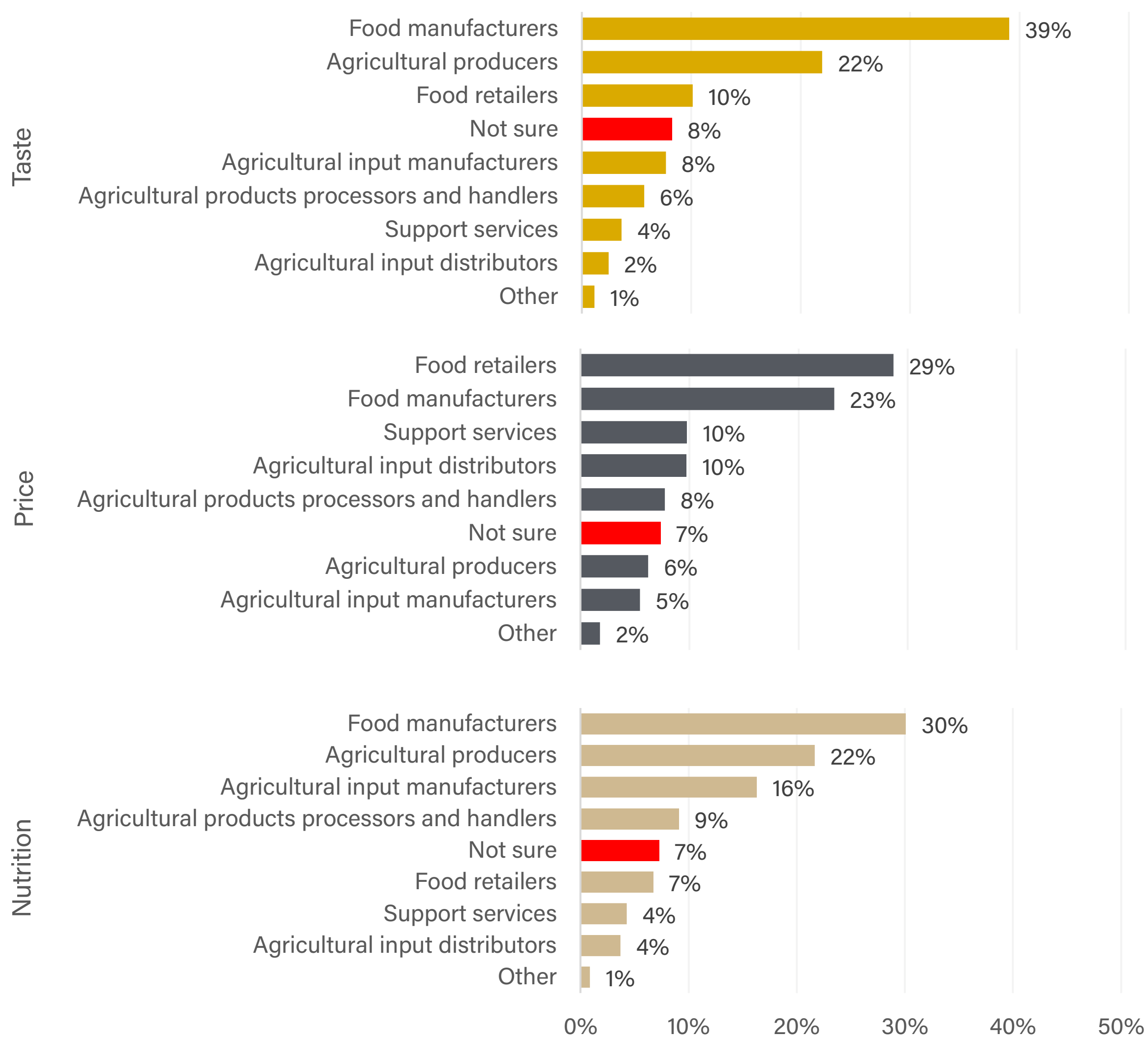
FOOD VALUE CHAIN

Which group in the food supply chain do consumers believe impacts taste, nutrition and affordability the most?

Since our first survey in 2022, taste, price and nutrition have dominated consumer food values. These are the key attributes consumers tend to place the most importance on when deciding which foods to buy. Our goal in this edition was to try and connect these core food values to different actors within the food value chain.

Figure 2 shows us that consumers primarily believe food manufacturers have the biggest impact on the taste and nutrition of their food, followed by agricultural producers. However, they think food retailers have the biggest impact on price/ affordability. This reveals who consumers look to to fulfill these needs. When asked how well these groups are doing at keeping food tasty, affordable and nutritious, the top selected groups for each attribute scored 7.7, 5.2 and 6.3 on a 0-10 scale, respectively. While consumer tastes have generally been satisfied, their opinions are more mixed regarding food suppliers' performance when it comes to food prices and affordability.

Figure 2. *"Which group in the food supply chain do you think has the most impact on the [ATTRIBUTE] of the food you buy and eat from the grocery store?"* Sep. 2025

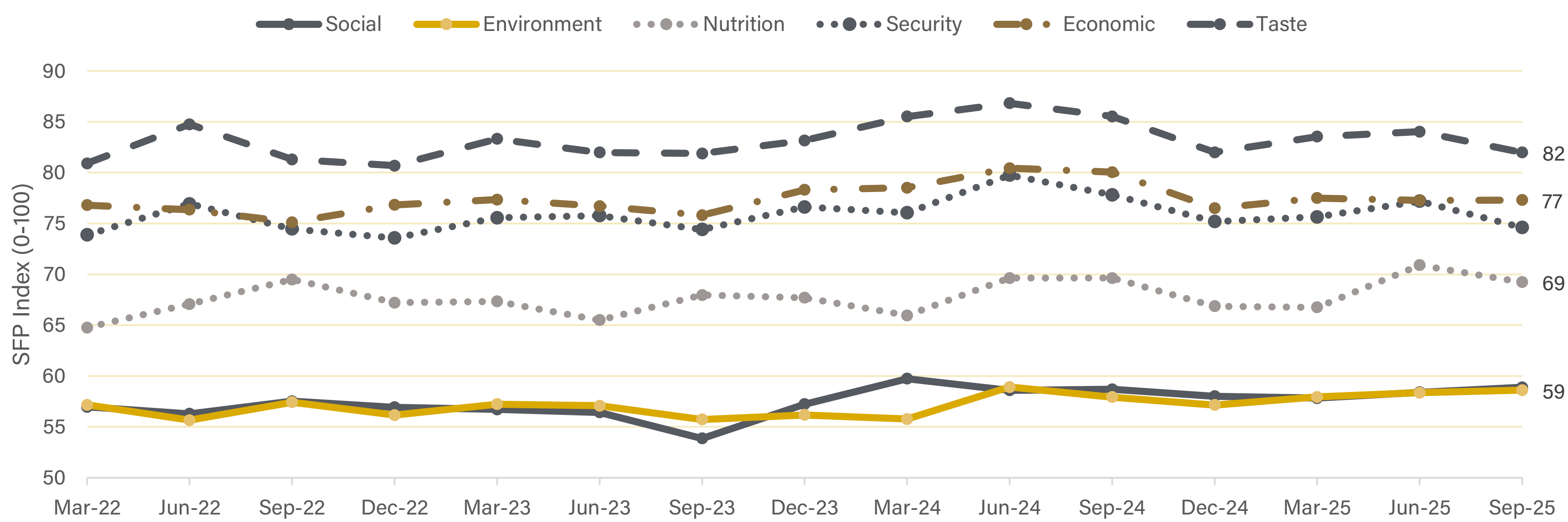


SUSTAINABLE DIETS

Are Americans making sustainable food purchasing decisions?

The Sustainable Food Purchasing (SFP) Index[4] remains stable across sub-indicators, averaging 70 out of 100 (**Figure 3**). The findings reveal that consumers consistently buy food based on taste and affordability above other factors, with these areas receiving the highest ratings during the study period. Security and nutrition also perform well, indicating that access to safe, nourishing food remains a consistent priority for food purchases. In contrast, purchasing behaviors tied to environmental and social responsibility are less common, implying that concerns such as waste reduction and ethical sourcing currently play a smaller role in shaping typical consumer behavior. **Figure 4** reveals higher and increasing levels of social, environmental and nutritional sustainability among household child status. This group may be more attuned to long-term health, environment and ethical considerations that impact future generations.

Figure 3. Sustainable Food Purchasing (SFP) Index, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025



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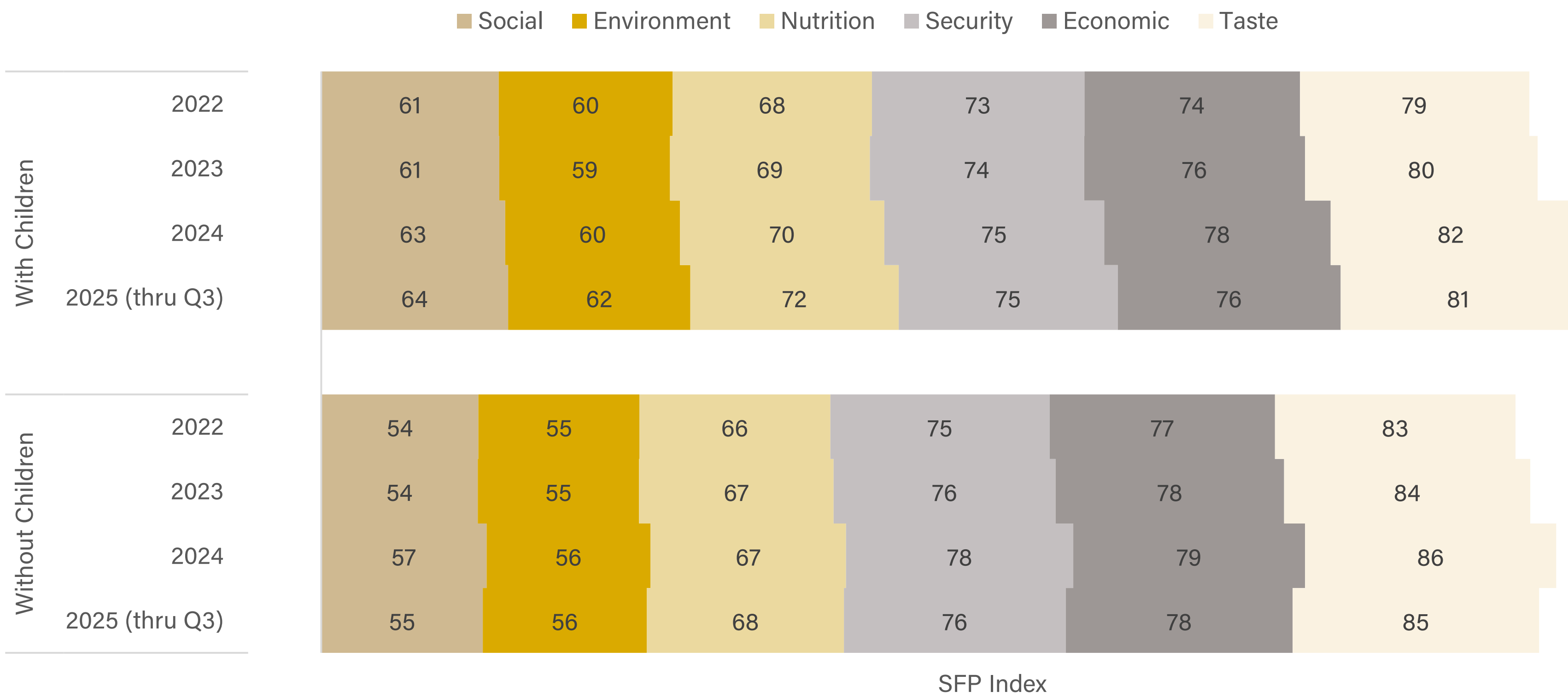
SUSTAINABLE DIETS

Figure 4. Sustainable Food Purchasing (SFP) Index by household child status, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025



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DIET QUALITY

What is the quality of the American adult diet?

Utilizing a nine-item questionnaire known as the Mini-EAT Tool[5], we estimate consumers' self-reported diet quality in the last 30 days.

Figure 5 summarizes average Mini-EAT scores since February 2024. Diets are classified as unhealthy (<61), intermediate (61-69) and healthy (69<). American adults score an average of 62.5 on this scale, which puts them in the intermediate classification. This average increased slightly from last month (+0.3). In September, 18%, 38% and 44% are classified as "healthy", "intermediate", and "unhealthy", respectively.

We observe no difference in diet quality scores between those who share a household with children compared to those without children (**Figure 6**). Despite making purchasing decisions that align with nutritional sustainability, individuals in households with children do not report higher personal diet quality. Could parents be prioritizing healthier food choices for their children, even if their own eating habits don't fully mirror those purchases? This presents an interesting question worth exploring further.

Figure 5. Purdue's American Diet Quality Index (PADQI), Feb. 2024 - Sep. 2025

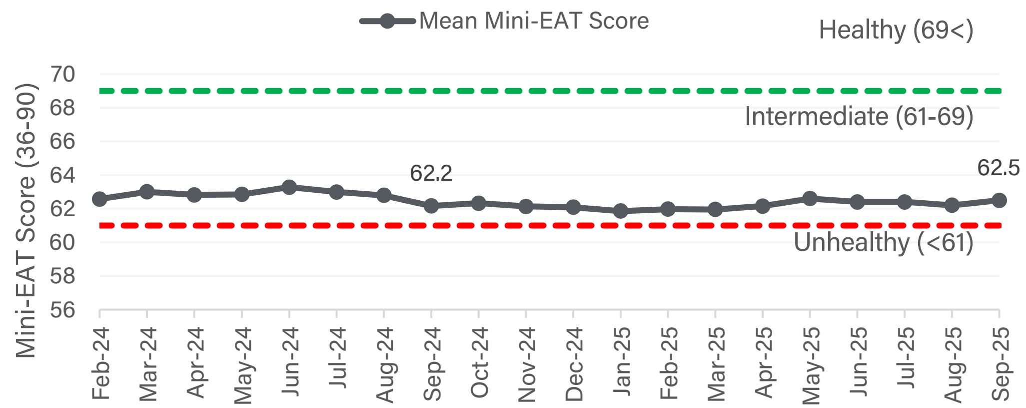
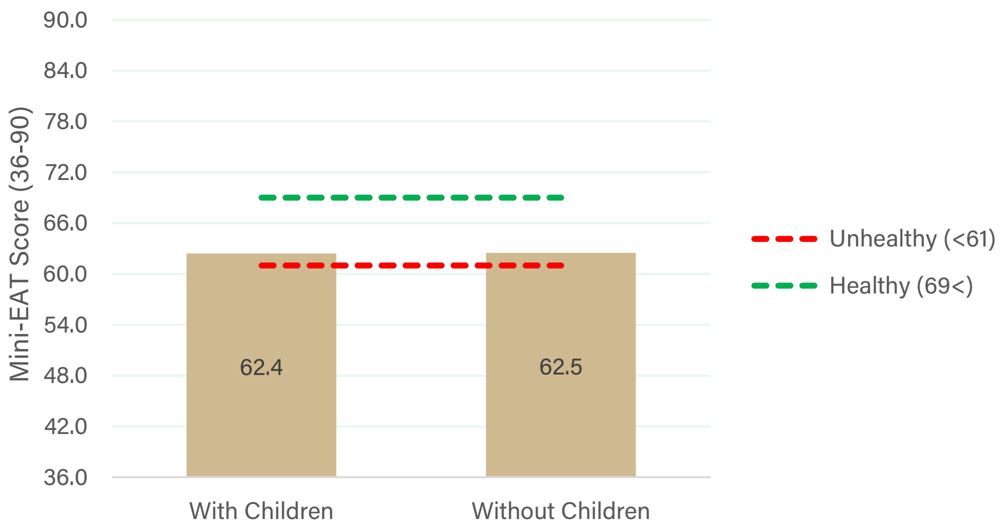


Figure 6. Weighted average Mini-EAT diet quality score by household child status, Feb. 2024 - Sep. 2025



FOOD SECURITY

Which Americans are having trouble buying food for their families?

Based on a set of six standard questions about food purchased and eaten in the past 30 days, we estimate national food insecurity to be 13% in September, a slight decrease from August (**Figure 7**).[6]

Aggregating all months of CFI data by year, we find that the rate of food insecurity is higher among households with children (15.6%) relative to households without children (13.3%) (**Figure 8**). This gap highlights the added vulnerability that families with children may face in maintaining consistent access to food. It underscores the importance of considering household composition when designing interventions or support programs aimed at reducing food insecurity. The presence of children can increase financial strain, food budgeting complexity and nutritional demands, all of which can contribute to elevated risk. These findings suggest that targeted strategies for family households, such as school lunch programs, could be critical in addressing persistent food insecurity.

Figure 7. Rate of household food insecurity in the last 30 days, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025

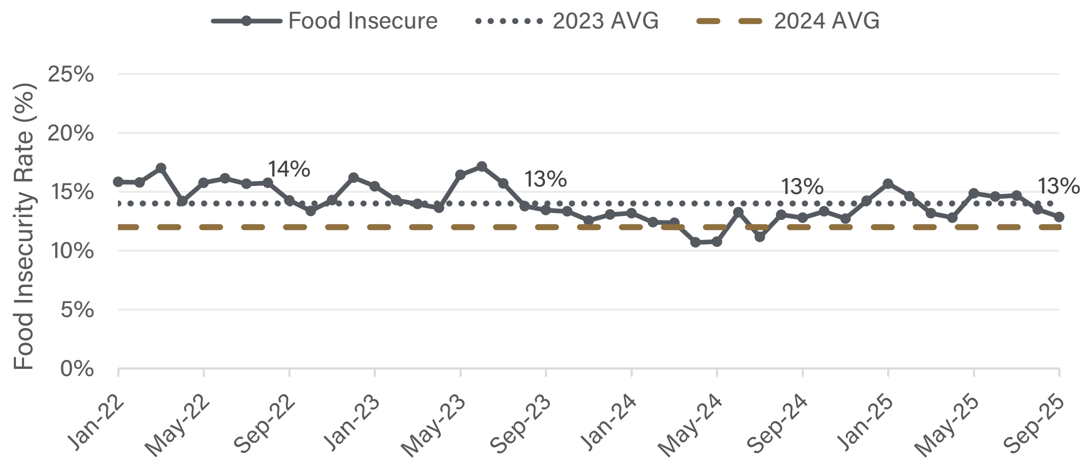
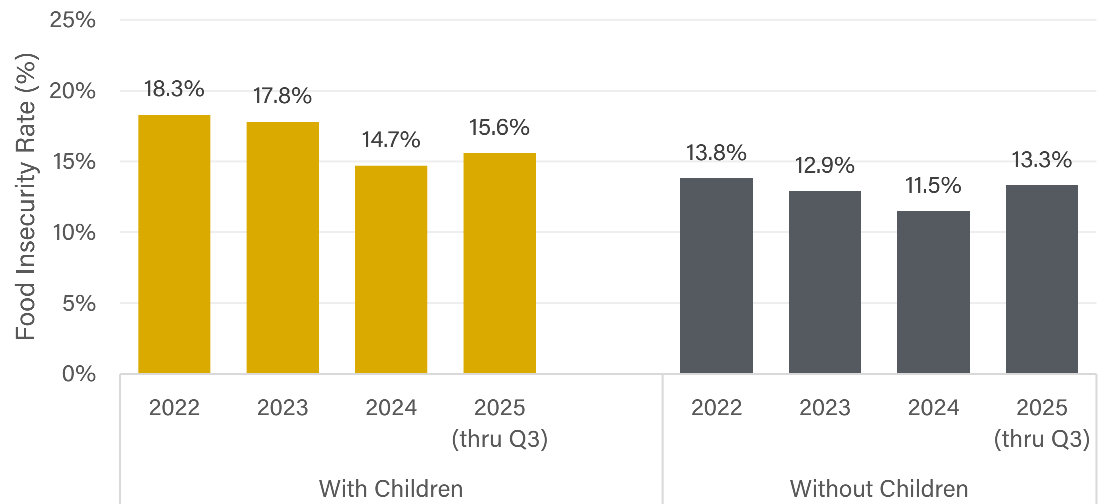


Figure 8. Rate of household food insecurity in the last 30 days by household child status, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025



FOOD EXPENDITURES

How much are American households spending on food?

Each month, consumers report their household's weekly spending on food from the last 30 days (**Figure 9**). On average, consumers reported spending about $130/week on groceries (food at home — FAH) and $76/week on restaurants and other carryout (food away from home — FAFH) in September.[7] The steady rise in food spending coincides with increasing food prices.

Both consumer estimates of food inflation over the past 12 months (5.0%) and expectations for food inflation over the next 12 months (4.2%) decreased slightly from August to September (**Figure 10**). The official CPI estimate of year-over-year food inflation rose again this month (3.2%), up 0.3 percentage points from last month. The consumer estimates and expectations of food inflation remain elevated above the CPI estimate, suggesting a consistent perception gap between consumer sentiment regarding food prices and official estimates. However, consumers appear to be picking up on directional changes in food inflation in recent months, with changes in estimates and expectations coinciding with increases in the CPI.

Figure 9. Weekly household food expenditures, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025

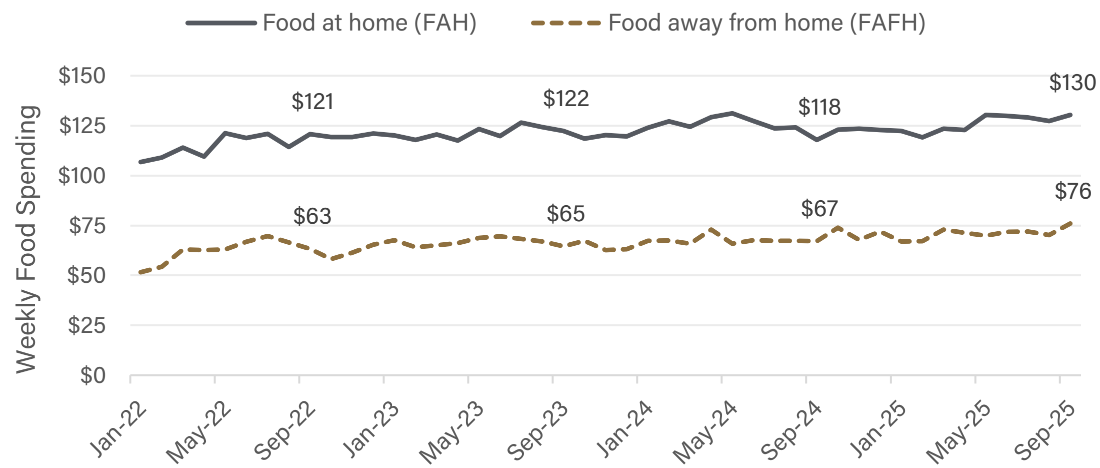
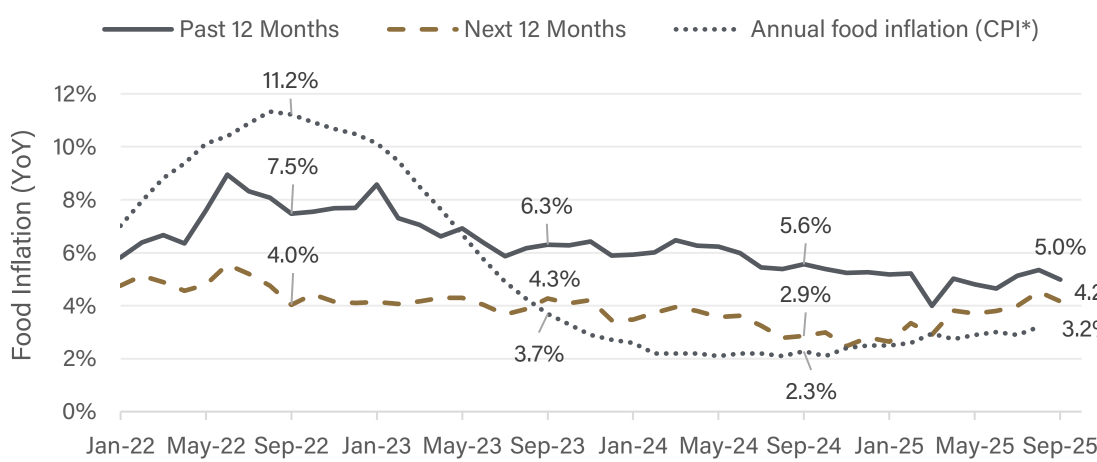


Figure 10. Consumer estimates of food inflation compared to gov. estimate, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025



FOOD EXPENDITURES

How does food away from home (FAFH) spending vary by household child status?

Figure 11 reveals an interesting difference between households with and without children. We see that the average number of meals eaten from restaurants and fast food places is nearly an entire household meal higher among households with children compared to households without children. This increase tapers off as the number of children increases, which may be indicative of the monetary cost of eating out outweighing the time savings.

Figure 12 provides further insight into how these households allocate their FAFH budgets. We see that the more convenient, time-saving takeout and delivery options make up a larger share of FAFH spending among households with children. Conversely, FAFH spending among child-free households is more evenly split between dine-in and other more convenient options. This pattern suggests that convenience plays a larger role in food purchasing decisions for families with children, likely due to time constraints.

Figure 11. FAFH meals in the last 7 days by number of children in the household, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025

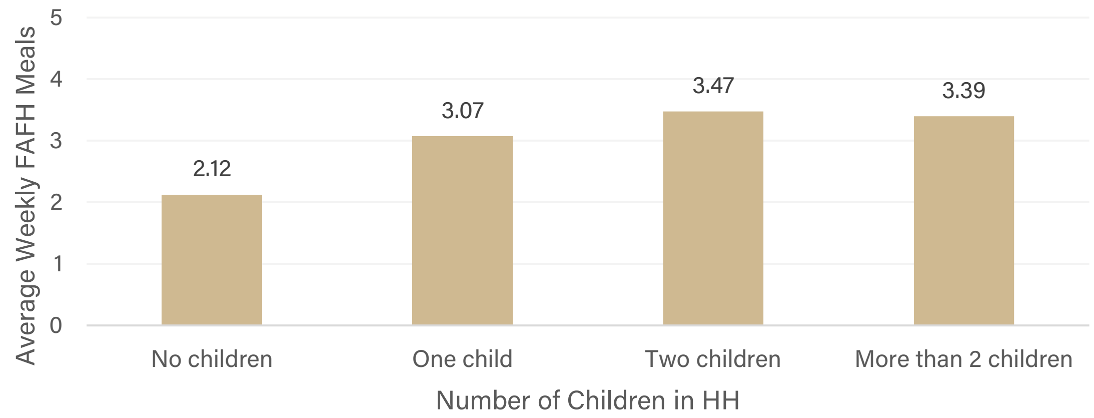
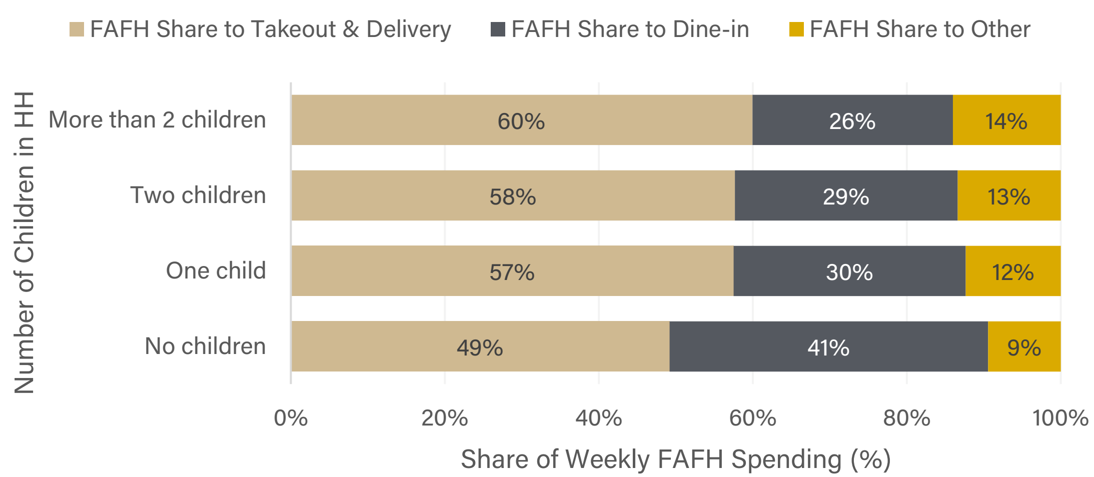


Figure 12. Share of FAFH spending by location type and number of children in the household, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025



CONSUMER BEHAVIORS

How are Americans with different household characteristics navigating their food environment?

Consumers are asked to report the frequency at which they chose certain foods, checked labels and performed at-home food behaviors (**Figure 13**).

Disaggregating consumer behavior frequency reveals interesting differences between those living with and without children. Aligned with the results in the SFP Index, we see that those with children in the household more frequently purchase foods commonly viewed as more sustainable or ethical than conventional options, such as choosing cage-free eggs, organic foods, local foods or wild-caught fish. Date and nutrition label checking is similar between households, though those with children are more likely to check for other traits.

Interestingly, those with children in the house are more likely to discard food past the use-by date, yet report engaging in "risky" food consumption behaviors (e.g., eating unwashed produce, undercooked meat, raw dough) more frequently than those without children.

Figure 13. Frequency of consumer shopping and eating habits by household child status, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025

	With Children	Without Children
Chose generic foods over brand-name foods	3.5	3.2
Chose local foods over non-local foods	3.4	2.9
Chose wild-caught fish over farm-raised fish	3.2	2.8
Chose grass-fed beef over conventional beef	3.3	2.7
Chose cage-free eggs over conventional eggs	3.3	2.7
Chose organic foods over non-organic foods	3.2	2.5
Chose plant-based proteins over animal proteins	2.9	2.2
Checked the use-by/sell-by date at the store	4.0	4.1
Checked the nutrition label before buying new foods	3.6	3.4
Checked for natural or clean labels	3.4	2.8
Checked where my food originated	3.2	2.7
Checked for food recalls	3.3	2.6
Checked for GMO ingredients	3.2	2.6
Checked how my food was produced	3.2	2.5
Took steps to reduce food waste at home	3.7	3.8
Recycled food packaging	3.6	3.5
Threw away food past the use-by date	3.6	3.1
Composted food scraps	2.8	2.2
Ate fruits and vegetables without washing them	2.6	2.0
Ate rare or undercooked meat	2.4	1.7
Ate raw dough or batter	2.4	1.7

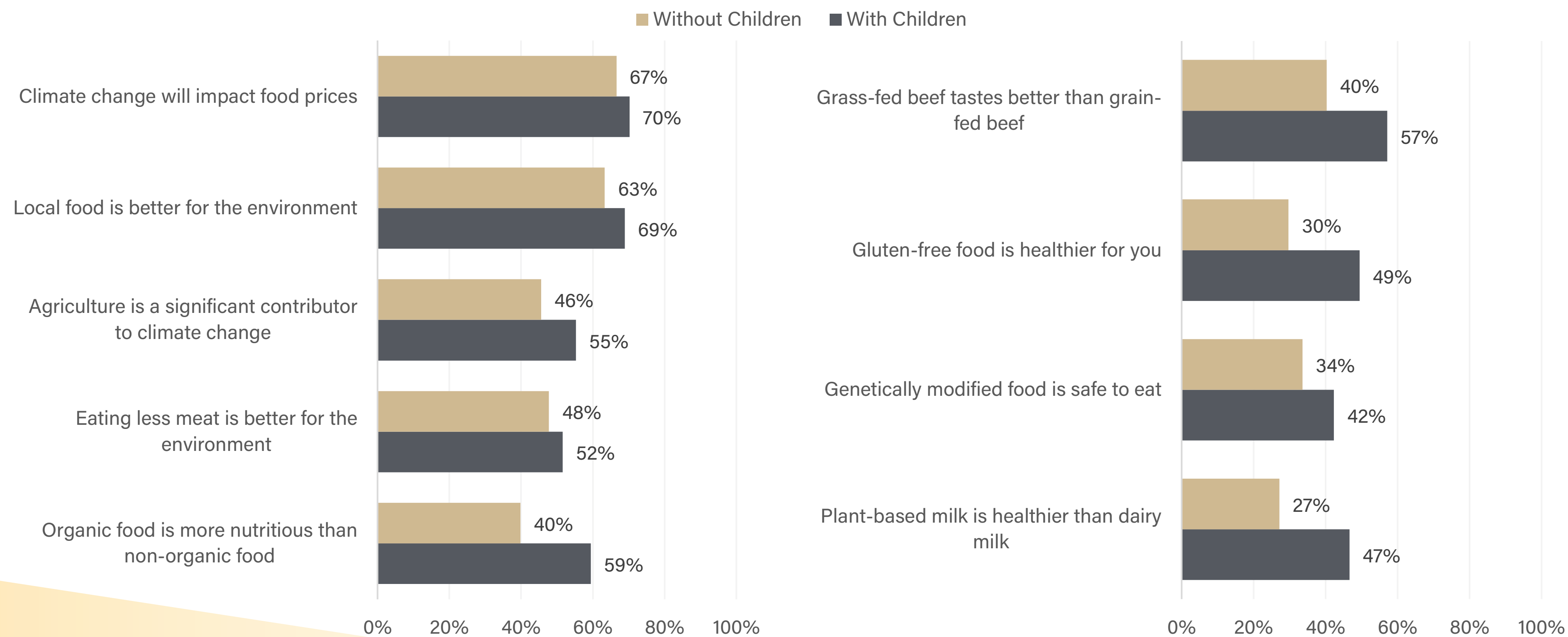
Mean Score	
5	Always
4	Often
3	Sometimes
2	Rarely
1	Never

CONSUMER BELIEFS

What do Americans believe about their food and food system?

Figure 14 summarizes consumer agreement with various statements about the food system disaggregated by household child status. Overall, the statements about the healthfulness and safety of gluten-free, plant-based and organic foods appear to resonate more with those who have children. Given that many such foods are typically marketed as "healthier," this may reflect heightened parental concern for food quality, especially when making food purchasing decisions for children. Alternatively, age differences may play a role, as households with children tend to include younger adults who may be more receptive to food trends. The gap in agreement closes when looking at the statements regarding the connection between agriculture and the environment.

Figure 14. Share of consumers who "somewhat agree" or "strongly agree" with claims about food by household child status, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025



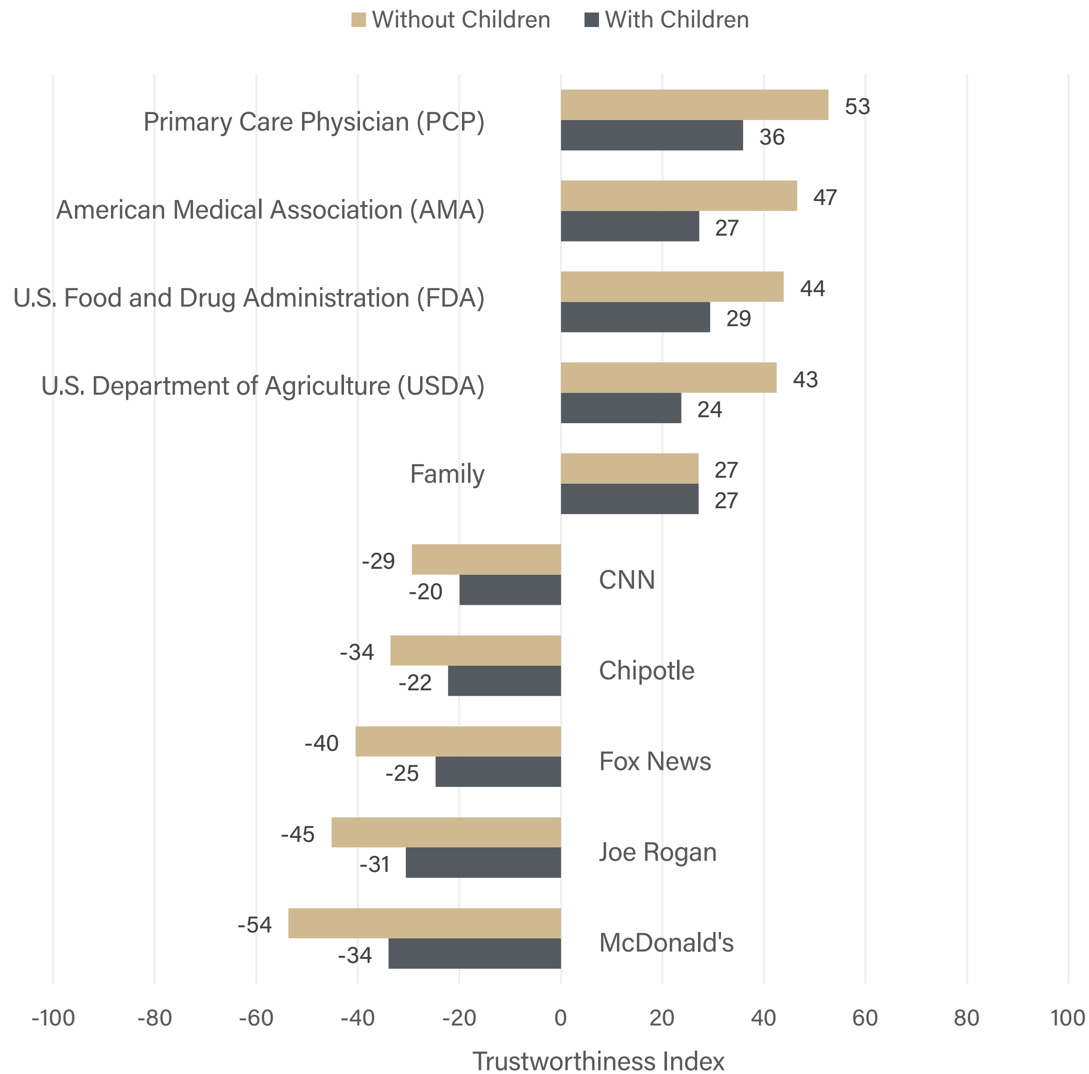
CONSUMER TRUST

Who do Americans trust on topics of food?

Respondents select their most-trusted and least-trusted sources of information about healthy and sustainable food from a list that includes a variety of information sources, such as news networks, government agencies, food companies, personal networks and higher education institutions. Responses are scored and converted to a Trust Index from -100 (least trusted) to 100 (most trusted).[8]

Figure 15 summarizes the trust scores by household child status. Overall, the composition of the top 5 most- and least-trusted sources of information on food remains similar to the overall population average. Healthcare providers and government organizations remain trusted by most, while fast food organizations and news media perform poorly on the index. The magnitude of scores between those with and without children indicates larger within-group differences between those who have children.

Figure 15. Trust index of food-related information sources by household child status, Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025



ENDNOTES

1 Data were collected from an online opt-in panel maintained by the company Dynata over a four-day period from September 15-18, 2025. The eligible population included U.S. adults ages 18+. A weighting method called iterative proportional fitting (or raking) was applied to ensure a demographically balanced sample by age, sex, race, census region, income, and SNAP participation. Population proportions reflect the most recent complete year of ACS census data (2024). Every respondent from the previous month was recontacted and asked to take the survey again. About 26% of August's sample participated this month, thus the rest of the sample was filled in with a new pool of respondents. Data collection for every survey begins on the third Monday of each month, unless otherwise dictated by holidays or extenuating circumstances. This report is released on the second Wednesday of the following month.

2 Sample size Sep. 2025: With Children (n=450); (n=758)
Sample size Jan. 2022 - Sep. 2025: With Children (n=17,007); (n=38,786)

3 Balagtas, J. et al. (2024). *Consumer Food Insights* 3(6). Center for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability, Department of Agricultural Economics, Purdue University. https://ag.purdue.edu/cfdas/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Report_202406-1-1.pdf

4 The Sustainable Food Purchasing (SFP) Index is a self-reported measure of food purchasing designed to assess how well consumer shopping habits align with healthy diets from sustainable food systems, as described by the EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health. A top score of 100 reflects consumer food purchasing that aligns with a set of key recommendations for better nurturing human health and supporting environmental sustainability. The SFP Index includes six components — Nutrition, Environment, Social, Economic, Security, and Taste—correlating with the different strategies for achieving food systems transformation.

5 Lara-Breitinger KM et al. *Validation of a Brief Dietary Questionnaire for Use in Clinical Practice: Mini-EAT (Eating Assessment Tool)*. J Am Heart Assoc. 2023 Jan 3;12(1):e025064. doi: 10.1161/JAHA.121.025064. Epub 2022 Dec 30. PMID: 36583423; PMCID: PMC9973598.

ENDNOTES

6 High or marginal food security (i.e., food secure): 0-1 reported indications of food-access problems; little indication of change in diet or food intake. Respondents who reported an income above 185% of the federal poverty line were also screened as having high food security. This determination was made according to research by Ahn et al. (2020), which shows that using a modified income-based screening procedure for internet surveys better approximates government estimates of food insecurity. Low food security (i.e., food insecure): 2-4 reported indications of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet; little indication of reduced food intake. Very low food security (i.e., food insecure): 5-6 reported indications of disrupted eating patterns, changes in diet, and reduced food intake.

7 Food at home (FAH) refers to food sales meant for home or off-site consumption and the value of donations and non-market acquisitions, which is acquired from outlets such as grocery stores, convenience stores, direct sales, etc. Food away from home (FAFH) refers to food sales meant for immediate consumption, federal food programs, and food furnished as an ancillary activity, which is acquired from outlets such as restaurants, bars, schools, etc.

8 Trust questions were not fielded in the Consumer Food Insights survey from October 2022 - December 2022. Starting June 2025, respondents were allowed to select up to 5 options for "most" and "least" trusted.